

KURT VILLADS JENSEN & DAVIDE SCOTTO

Preface

Riccoldo da Monte di Croce: pilgrim, missionary, scholar. A Dominican friar from the convent of Santa Maria Novella in Florence, who spent years travelling in the Middle East and studying Islam and other religions and religious denominations he encountered. When he died in 1320, he left several significant works of which his *Contra legem Sarracenorum* came to have an enormous influence upon later Christian understanding of Islam for centuries—and indirectly still today.

The importance of Riccoldo has always been recognized by researchers, but the scholarly interest in him has grown almost exponentially within the last generation or two. Many more scholars are now studying Riccoldo than ever before, and many more aspects of his works and working methods are becoming better understood than in the past. It was therefore timely to gather some of the experts to discuss and present new results. The idea to organize such a conference was conceived during the 2016 international medieval congress in Kalamazoo where Davide Scotto gave a paper on Riccoldo's *Letters to the Triumphant Church* and he and Kurt Villads Jensen met for the first time.

The conference *Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (†1320). Missionary to the Near East and Expert on Islam* was held on 7–8 September 2017 in Stockholm in the splendid building of the Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities. The Academy also provided the conference with generous financial support, for which we want to express our sincere gratitude.

The contributions from the conference are published here, supplemented with a few additional chapters by authors who could not be present at the conference. The publication has been long on its way for several reasons, among which was the Covid pandemic. It is a very great pleasure that it has at last come to publication.

Jean-Marie Mérioux was an outstanding scholar, editor of Riccoldo's *Contra legem*, and also an enthusiastic and inspiring personality. When Kurt Villads Jensen first began working on Riccoldo for his master's thesis in the early 1980s, he wrote to a Dominican convent outside Paris for information without knowing that it had been demolished during the French Revolution. Months later, he got an answer from Jean-Marie Mérioux, with the opening "Thanks to God and in spite of the French Postal service, I received your letter", and pages of precious and helpful information. The letter had been redirected to the Dominican convent in Paris that Mérioux happened to be visiting at that time.

Mérioux was invited to participate in the Stockholm conference from the very start of the project. For health reasons, he could not come to Sweden in person, but supported the conference and encouraged its "équipe riccoldienne" by letters over all the years of its planning. Without hesitation, he kindly accepted the invitation to contribute to the proceedings with a revised version of his ground-breaking study and partial French translation of Riccoldo's letters, which the reader will find here in an English translation. His last message was sent to Davide Scotto on 8 January 2019, soon after Epiphany, from the Dominican Convent of Marseilles. May this book be, in a way, the accomplishment of both his wish and our promise.

Cher collègue et ami

Recevez tous mes voeux les meilleurs en cette belle fête de l'Épiphanie: pour vous, vos travaux, et pour toute l'équipe riccoldienne que je n'oublie pas: cette année j'ai encore eu divers problèmes de santé qui m'ont limité dans mes possibilités de travail, mais pas dans mon intérêt pour tout ce qui fut au coeur de la vie de Riccoldo: le salut éternel de tous les hommes. J'espère que l'édition des Actes du Colloque Riccoldo se réalise petit à petit.

Ici à Marseille je retrouve sans cesse des chrétiens qui viennent du pays oriental de Riccoldo: ceux de l'Eglise de l'Orient ou de celle d'Antioche.

Très amicalement à vous et aux collègues "riccoldiens",

Fr Jean-Marie Mérioux

The volume is dedicated to the memory of Jean-Marie Mérioux, who died in November 2020.

KURT VILLADS JENSEN & DAVIDE SCOTTO

Riccoldo as an Author and His Intellectual Afterlife*

Riccoldo da Monte di Croce (c. 1243–1320), Dominican friar, missionary and scholar was truly a remarkable person. He is notable for his extensive travels in difficult and dangerous terrains, for his impetuous and sometimes rash temperament, for his deep interest in theology and how various peoples think about God, and for his learnedness. He is not least remarkable for his prolific writings which enable us to follow him over the years, physically from city to city, but also intellectually, to see how he worked with different genres of writings and treated different topics, and how he applied different methods according to where he was writing and to whom. Riccoldo is also of unusual importance for the European intellectual tradition because of the enormous influence he has had on later Christian studies of Islam and of the Qur'an. He is well known to scholars and has been so for hundreds of years; over the past few decades he has attracted the interest of a rapidly growing number of specialists from various academic fields and various countries.

Riccoldo entered the Dominican Order in 1267¹ when he was probably in his twenties, and was accepted in the Convent of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. Five years later, in 1272, he became *lector* in the apparently newly established *Studium artium* at the Dominicans in Pisa, and in 1287 he was appointed to the Convent in Prato, from where he was transferred back to Florence in 1288.² It is probably while he was in Pisa that he composed his commentary on Aristotle's *Peri Hermeneias*.³ As far as ongoing

* Pp. 9–14 written by Kurt Villads Jensen, pp. 15–19 by Davide Scotto.

1 Orlandi 1955, vol. 1, p. 222.

2 Mérigoux 1986, p. 15.

3 Riccoldo da Monte di Croce, *Scripta super II Peryhermenias*.

research allows to be stated, it is a standard introductory textbook within the field, of no great originality,⁴ but up to date with references to Thomas Aquinas and well suited for the basic teaching Riccoldo was undertaking. It is a decent pedagogical presentation but does not earn Riccoldo the merit of being considered a profound philosopher or logician, as has sometimes been claimed by modern scholars. It seems he even found the topic somewhat difficult as he later remembered his study time as laborious.⁵ Riccoldo's introduction to Aristotle exists in only one manuscript and has not previously been studied.⁶

Florence and not least Santa Maria Novella were intellectual and cultural hotspots in the second half of the 13th century,⁷ with numerous connections to the wider Mediterranean world and further. Merchants such as Marco Polo and missionaries travelled along the same routes in these years, and the Florentine Dominicans had connections to brethren and convents in the East.⁸ Florence was also a rapidly growing city with significant social conflicts and lively political debates which featured in sermons, treatises, and diverse works of art. A Florentine who later was to become famous was Dante. He was exiled in 1301 because of his political work and opinions, but before that he may have followed the teaching in Santa Maria Novella and the Franciscan Convent of Santa Croce. It has been claimed that the composition of his *Comedia divina* may have been inspired by Islamic narratives to which he may have been introduced by Riccoldo or others from the religious missionary milieu in Florence.⁹

Florence was a place for innovative experimentation, and it was here in 1288 that Riccoldo decided to become a missionary to the Near East, leaving that same year. On Palm Sunday 1288, Pope Nicolaus IV had celebrated mass in Rome together with Rabban Bar Sauma, the envoy and teacher of the leader of the Nestorian church, Catholikos Mar Yaballaha III. The mass was of great symbolic significance and marked the—today partial—communion between the Catholic Church in the West and the Nestorian Church in the East. On 3 September that same year the Pope promulgated the

4 Thanks to Henrik Lagerlund, Professor in Medieval Philosophy at Stockholm University, for his evaluation of this text.

5 Riccold de Monte Croce, *Pèrègrination en Terre Sainte et au Proche Orient*, pp. 36–38: “quas longas et laboriosas peregrinationes adsumperam adhuc secularis existens, ut addiscerem illas seculares scientias quas liberales appellat.”

6 Shortly described by Bauer in Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, *Epistole ad Ecclesiam triumphantem* (2021); Booth 2021, pp. 50–51.

7 For Santa Maria Novella, see Pegoretti 2020; Booth 2021.

8 Loenertz 1932; 1937; George-Tvrtković 2012, pp. 4–15; Hautala 2020; Booth 2021.

9 Tolan 2007. On the much-debated topic of Islamic sources in Dante's work, see most recently Celli 2022.

bull *Cum hora jam undecima*, “As it is now in the eleventh hour”, which had already been issued several times during the 13th century by earlier popes.¹⁰ It was a strong exhortation to go to the East and convert all peoples and prepare for the second coming of Christ. Riccoldo left very shortly afterwards, after having applied from the Master of the Dominican Order permission to missionize and possibly to become a martyr. He set out for the Holy Land and reached Acre either in December 1288 or very early in 1289.

Riccoldo first visited the holy places in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and later in 1289 continued his travels through Turkey and Armenia. In 1290 he was in Mosul. When Acre as the last Christian stronghold in the Holy Land fell to the Mamluks in 1291, Riccoldo went to Baghdad where he spent probably several years studying Arabic and the Qur’an. He claimed that his travel companions—of whom we know nothing—left him alone in the remotest part of the Orient: “Et relictus sum solus in Baldaco a sociis in profundis partibus orientis.” In 1294 or 1295 the Mongol ruler, the ilkhan Ghaza, converted to Islam. For a short period, Christians began to be persecuted, and that might have led Riccoldo to leave Baghdad and travel through the desert in disguise as a camel driver.¹¹ On the other hand, he might also have stayed in Baghdad during the 1290s until he returned to the Italian Peninsula. We simply do not know.

Riccoldo was back in Florence by the end of 1299, recalled home “to explain some dubious points to the papal see.”¹² He had the intention and the hope of returning to the East and therefore continued to grow a beard, but spent the remaining years of his life in the Italian Peninsula, mostly Florence, until his death on 31 October 1320. He taught, preached, and functioned for a short while as prior, and he was also a prolific writer. He wrote five letters to the Triumphant Church (*Epistole ad Ecclesiam triumphantem*), a travel description (*Liber peregrinationis*), a refutation of Islam (*Contra legem Sarracenorum*), and a treatise on the different peoples of the East, their beliefs and how to missionize among them (*Libellus ad nationes orientales*). From various internal criteria, Emilio Panella came to the conclusion that they were all written within a couple of years after Riccoldo had returned to Florence, i.e., between 1300 and 1301.¹³ It is, however, possible that it took around ten years for Riccoldo to finish them all, as argued by Phillip Booth, so that the *Ad nationes orientales* was completed only in 1310. Booth also stresses that the composition of Riccoldo’s works was not a linear process

10 Hautala 2020, pp. 40–41; Schmieder 2000.

11 Mérigoux 1986, pp. 26–27; cf. Mérigoux’s chapter in this volume.

12 Orlandi 1955, p. xx “Demum pro quibusdam dubiis articulis per sedem apostolicam declarandis ad Ytalie partes remeans cum proposito redeundi, propter quod et barbam plurimo tempore nutriebat [...]”

13 Panella 1986, pp. xxxviii–xl.

in which the completion of one was followed by the inception of another. They all underwent revisions, and new information and comments were added by Riccoldo.¹⁴

Other works including sermons are known to have existed but are now lost. Some writings have been ascribed to Riccoldo erroneously, while others are still disputed. The *Tractatus seu disputatio contra Sarracenos et Alchoranum* was edited in 2017 by Daniel Pachurka who argues that it is Riccoldo's thorough reworking of a treatise by the Catalan Dominican Ramon Martí.¹⁵ In the present volume, Pachurka analyses the *Tractatus* and its refutation of the prophethood of Mohammad and discusses how and why the original text by Ramon Martí has been changed.

The five letters to the Triumphant Church were written while Riccoldo was still in Baghdad, at least according to his own words: they were *scripta in Oriente*. They may have been edited and polished and only finalized when he was back at Santa Maria Novella, but they reflect Riccoldo's grave concern and spiritual anxiety after the fall of Acre in 1291 and the conversion of Baghdad's ruler to Islam in 1295. They are lamentations in the Old Testament tradition, meditations on the will of God and His plans for humanity, but also rhetorically high style, almost sermons, in order to comfort the believers: Persevere, in spite of troubles, in spite of what seems to be Muslim superiority. The letters have been preserved in only one manuscript (MS Vat. Lat. 7317),¹⁶ but they have attracted much attention from modern scholars. Some have read them as revealing Riccoldo's inner feelings, others as a rhetorical exercise.¹⁷ In this volume, Jean-Marie Mériçoux places the letters in context and provides translations of lengthy passages that allow us to get an impression of the style of the letters. Davide Scotto demonstrates through a close reading of the letters that Riccoldo was firm in faith in spite of Muslim success, and in spite of his strong questioning and accusations against God and the saints in Heaven.

The travel description, *Liber peregrinationis*, was probably begun while Riccoldo was in the Orient and emended and updated when he was back in Florence.¹⁸ It is a rich and interesting work with several diverse themes and descriptions of the peoples Riccoldo met. The chapters concern the Holy Land, including Bethlehem and Jerusalem; Turkey and the Turks; Mongols; Persia; Kurds; Mosul; Jacobites and Nestorians; Muslims and Islam; monsters in Baghdad; and Sabeans. Riccoldo's route from Jerusalem to Baghdad was not the most direct, but one that enabled him to visit some Dominican

14 Booth 2021, pp. 56–57.

15 Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, *Tractatus seu disputatio contra Saracenos et Alchoranum*.

16 Scotto 2023.

17 Panella 1989; Weltecke 2007; Shagrir 2012; Bauer 2021; Scotto 2021a.

18 Riccoldo later added references to his *Contra legem Sarracenororum* in the margin to *Liber peregrinationis*, cf. Kappler's edition, pp. 200–201.